



BIGOS

6

PRINTMAKERS

OF POLISH ORIGIN





B I G O S

MARGARET BIALOKOZ SMITH
KRYSTYNA BORKOWSKA
KASIA JANUSZKO
SIMON LEWANDOWSKI
KAREN STRANG
STEFAN SZCZELKUN

21st. May to 18th JUNE 1988



ST PAUL'S
CONTEMPORARY ART
GALLERY

L E E D S

STOWE HOUSE 5 BISHOPGATE ST LEEDS

LS1 5DY · TELEPHONE 0532 · 456421

MONDAY TO FRIDAY 10—5 SATURDAY 12—2

FOREWORD

We are very pleased to welcome the artists from the BIGOS group to St Paul's Gallery, with the vigorous contemporary Polish aspect they bring to our programme. The exhibition comes to Leeds through the enthusiasm of our Exhibition Organiser, Karen Sowerby, and the generous practical support of the artists themselves.

For this exhibition our main funders, Yorkshire Arts and West Yorkshire Grants are joined by the Angels of St Paul's, and we would like to thank them all most warmly for their contributions.

James Hamilton

Director

Yorkshire Contemporary Art Group

SOLIDARITY IN DIVERSITY

If one had to explain the nature of Polish Culture concisely a good description would be 'BIGOS - like'.

BIGOS is a traditional Polish delicacy of savoury character consumed hot, and washed down usually with a glass of vodka. It's a mixture of various meats, vegetables, mushrooms and spices. So is Polish culture with its variety of points of view.

There is perhaps much truth in the old Polish joke - 38 million poles represent 38 million opinions.

One might say that this is a weakness, contrary to the spirit of Unity and Solidarity, a weakness which caused the disappearance of Polish statehood in the 18th. century.

But, in this diversity there is considerable strength as well - nobody is going to force 38 million **individuals** to accept and follow dubious totalitarian ideologies like communism or fascism or any other 'ism (except perhaps romanticism!). To paraphrase "*Cogito ergo sum*" into "*Dividor ergo sum*" gives us "**I exist because I differ**" (from others).

Is it a coincidence that a group of young Polish artists in Great Britain chose to call themselves 'BIGOS'. Their aim is to propagate Polish culture in the country where they live now. Why? How can one explain the long chain of experiences, emotions, thoughts and dreams which link past and present in the Polish soul?

It is inspiring for us old world immigrants that the second, even the third generation of Poles are continuing to maintain links with the "Home of their Ancestors".

BIGOS - good luck and '*bon appetit!*'.

Jerzy Strutynski, Liverpool, 1988.

A COLLECTIVE HISTORY

SIX POLISH WOMEN ARTISTS. APRIL 1986.

Polish Cultural Institute, Hammersmith, London.

BAUMANN, BORKOWSKA, JACOBSON, JANUSZKO, MANN, SCICINSKA

BIGOS GROUP EXHIBITION No.1. AUGUST 1986.

Brixton Gallery, London.

BIGOS GROUP EXHIBITION No.2. SEPTEMBER 1986

INSTALLATION "In Transit"

The Crypt, Bloomsbury, London.

PHOTO DAY DUETS. MARCH 1987.

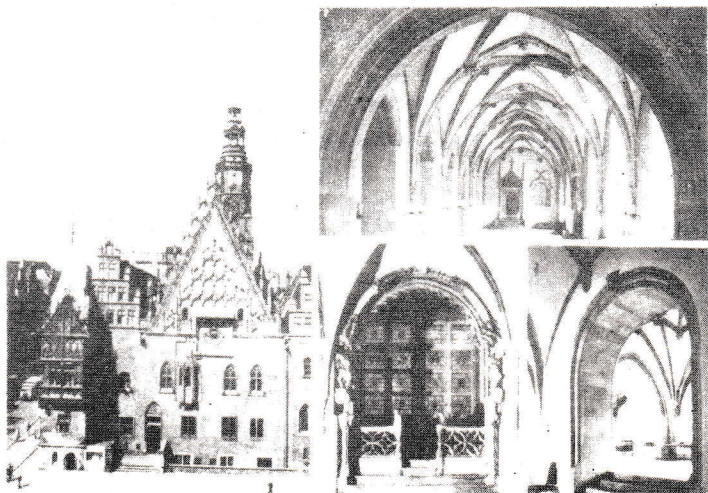
Szczelkun, Januszko, Strang, Ochocki and others

Chisenhale Studios, Bow, London.

3 CHOIRS FESTIVAL, WORCESTER, AUGUST 1987

Worcester City Art Gallery.

Borkowska, Borkowski, Januszko, Rogocki, Strang, Szczelkun, Szczerek.



REPORT ON WORCESTER

The last BIGOS exhibition was in Worcester City Art Gallery from 1st to 29th August 1987 to accompany the three choirs festival which was featuring Penderecki in person.

Jozefa Rogocki showed an installation of **charred railway sleepers** that was considered too dangerous to allow the public into unaccompanied. There was a recital of music specially composed for the piece.

Janus Scerek (note the recent anglicisation of the name from Janusz Szczerek) took over an **empty exhibition case** in the adjacent museum with his video installation which proved controversial in content (an erotic episode was considered for censorship as unsuitable for children) and in context (it transgressed the serious purpose and ambiance of the city museum).

Stefan Szczelkun set up his 'Housework' structure, tarred and feathered, in the main gallery space. In front of the hut and cutting the gallery in two was a **peat potato field** which strained the municipal nerves laid out as it was directly on the carpet.

Krystyna Borkowska made a series of 'banners' which wove together drawings from different **'unknown' Polish artists**. These were later carried into the street and used in a "demonstration". Szczelkun's house was also wheeled around the streets and used as a base for improvisation by him and Andrej Borkowski.

Borkowski's gigantic nest, built in the gallery from **discarded cardboard tubes and boxes** aroused mixed feelings with its valueless materials and 'unskilled' and ephemeral poetics.

Kasia Januszko showed a dramatic series of large monochrome photographs of **painted buildings in Poland**. Later she made monoprints in the famous local porcelain factory with her now well developed technique which uses direct impressions of objects associated with production processes.

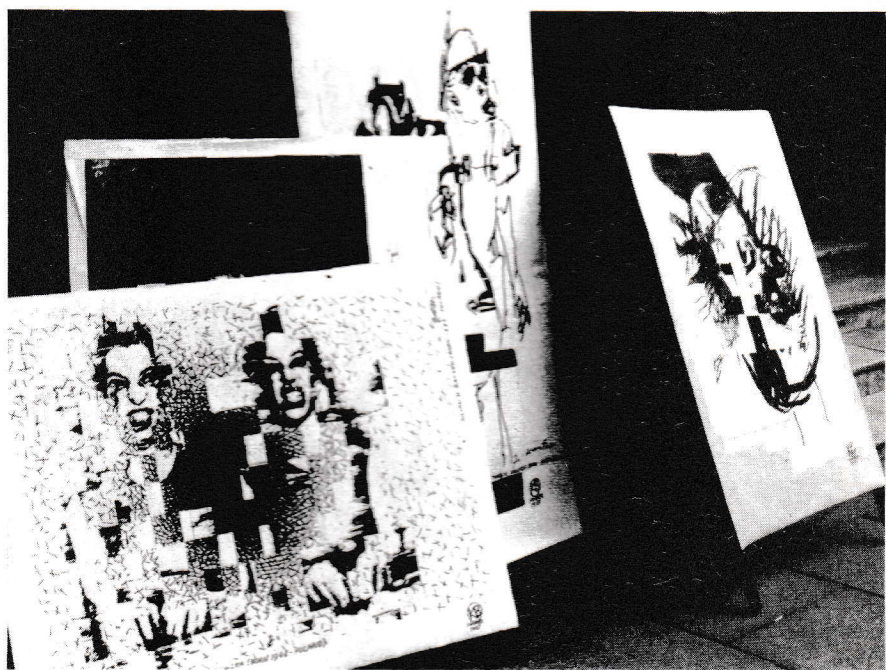
Karen Strang showed a video hidden behind a **slashed canvas screen** in the foyer,

Sylvia Ziranek also did an evening performance but not as part of the group because of her contract with Anthony Reynolds Gallery.

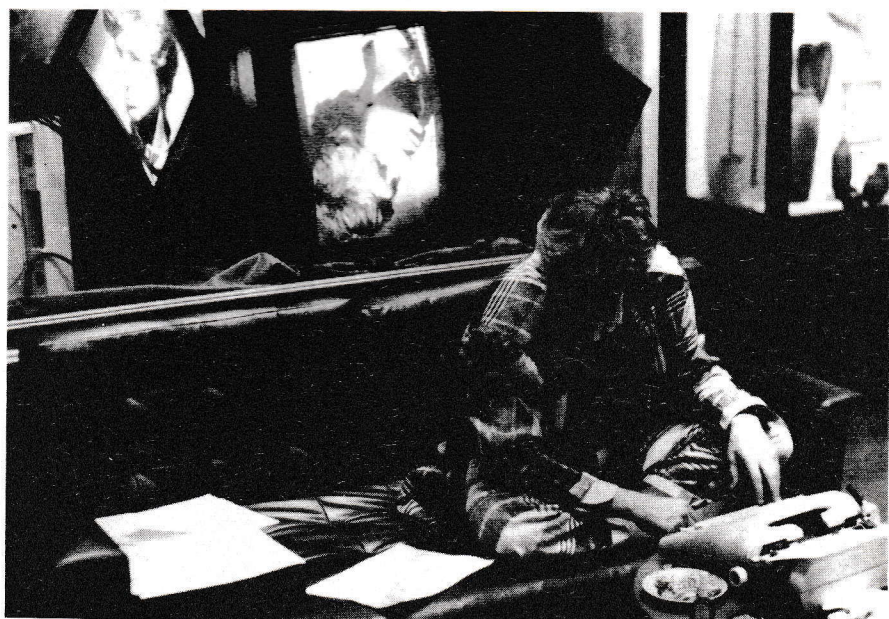
There is more that there is not space for... but it must be said that the event became an extravaganza of experimental work that stretched the municipal gallery context to its limits. Many thanks must go to the marvellous Shiela McGregor who had to mediate many moments of controversy on our behalf. This was the first show by BIGOS artists involved in performance and installation work and the chance to work together out of London was much appreciated.



BIGOS street performance; Worcester 1987;



Borkowska; banners, Worcester 1987.



Scerek; video installation, Worcester 1987.

MARGARET BIALOKOZ SMITH

For me, printing technique is the quickest route from the poetic to the pictorial. I start work on a zinc plate, a card or a piece of perspex without having a precise idea about what the final result will be.

Like my paintings, the prints are born out of chance encounters with matter and the intense feelings roused by the particular subject.

My concern with the world I live in; the creative and destructive forces of human beings; the ambiguity of life and its physical and spiritual content are the predominant themes in my art.

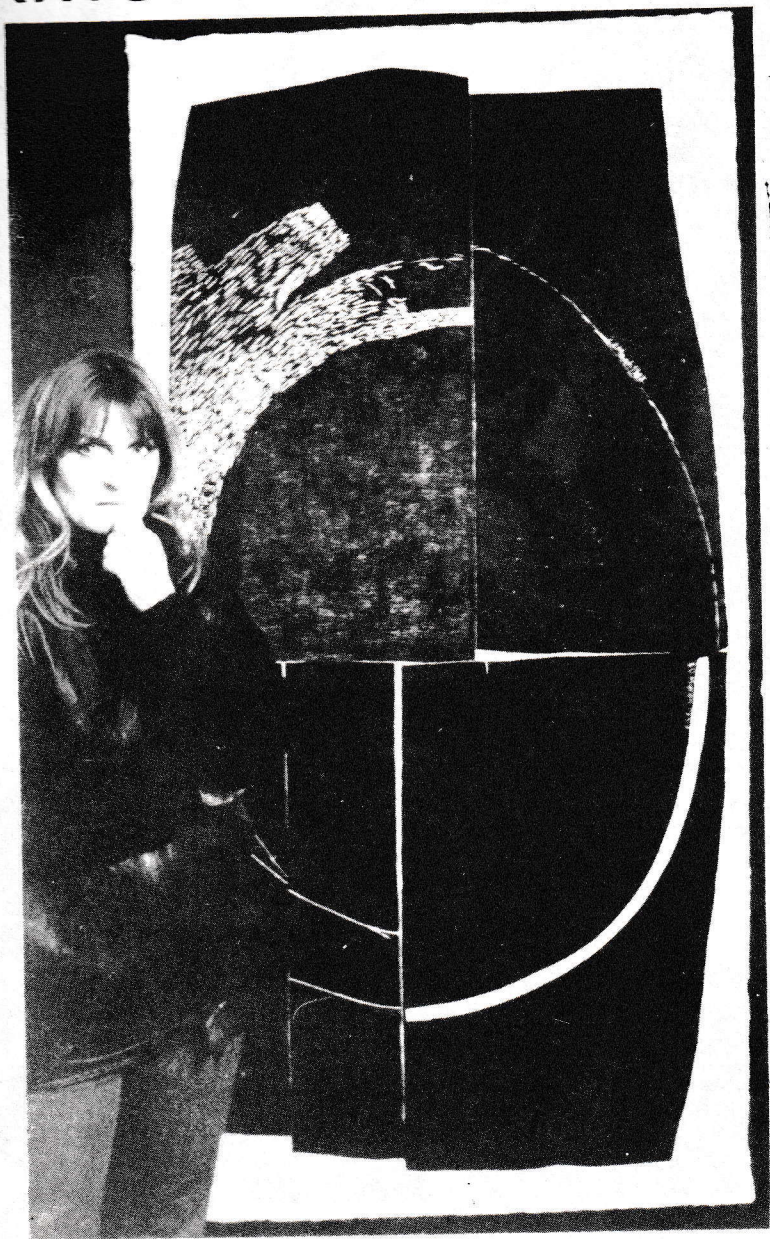
The printing medium allows me to explore and express spontaneously my vision in a pictorial form, using symbolic or representational images. During the last few years, since I started printing, I have evolved my own technique of working. This varies, depending on the kind of plate I happen to work on. Every print suggests a new excitement, concept and vision. Very often I return to the old plates and use them in a different way, or work on them further, or cut them to change the image.

I never cease to be amazed by the unlimited possibilities and the unexpected results which can be achieved in printing processes.





KRYSTYNA BORKOWSKA



2. May → Monday

Dear Simon,

Thanks for your call last week.

Sorry to take so long, but somehow I can't get this catalogue together. Nothing seems quite right ~~no~~ ill-ustrate those lino-cuttings that I am going to show in Leeds.

These are three large (3' x 6') black and white prints Δ , \square , \circ .
I was working on them last year at exactly the same dates as my friend Ania. She - in Warsaw. I - in London.
We have worked out 3 dates for Δ , 3 dates for \square , and 4 dates for \circ .
It was great fun. ~~sounds like wrong word for it,~~
~~it was a bit spiritual in fact.~~

When I worked on them I decided not to have a pre-conception as to how each piece was going to look like.

All we settled was : the size - SUZUKI paper (3'x 6')
one colour - black
and three basic figures Δ , \square , \circ .

So, for example: on the first date for Δ I would mark \rightarrow cut the piece for Δ not thinking about what I'm going to follow ~~date~~ it with on our next date, which would be within a week or ten days time.

On a second date I would do something to complement the previous 'mark'.

and the final date for Δ would be to close the composition in such a way that would feel 'comfortable' on that day.

This way the final composition would kind of surprise me, as if

it was making itself on its own. I would in fact be just a tool.

Anyway, I enclose a photo of \circ with myself but it looks ODD in that small size. ~~I want~~ You see, I think the size of those works is essential.

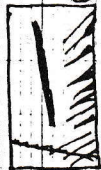
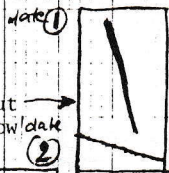
H

Hope you can use this for the catalogue, I'm sure you'll think of something.

See you soon,

love

Krystyna Borkowska



KASIA JANUSZKO



Advertisement, travel insurance, Lodz.

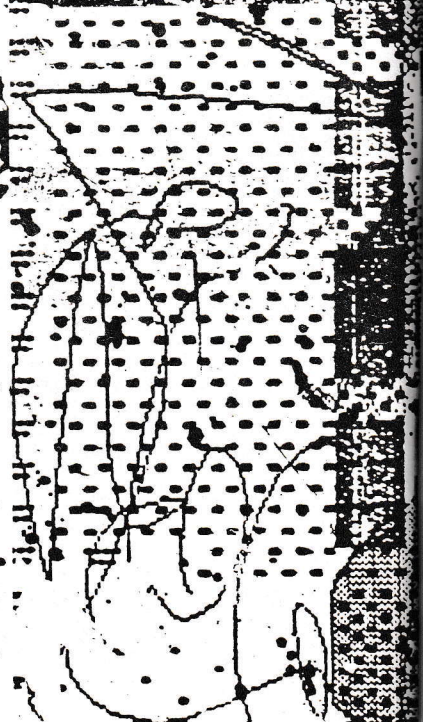


Advertisement, leather goods, Lodz.

SIMON LEWANDOWSKI

The transformation of substances lies at the heart of all art, power for the printmaker, and the mystery of their transformation enables an alchemical collaboration between physical universe and the unconscious. The process takes place as a series of revelations, oil, brick, wood, submitting new to forces of pressure, motion, great electricity, the action of the artist's mind, dictated by precedent by the now learning of craft and the complex operation of systems which have themselves passed through transformations at the hands of anonymous others comes the same message - the VOICE OF MATTER speaking the LANGUAGE OF FORMS. Only in Dreams and Myth can language be made, the artist's code drawn, and poses a question (IN DRAWING THE UNCONSCIOUS MOST EASILY SPEAKS ELEMENTS FROM MYTH AND HISTORY CAN MEET AND COMBINE ADDRESSING THE INFINITE IN THE LANGUAGE CLOSEST TO IT OWN). The substances now given a voice of their own, like

INDUSTRY





KAREN STRANG

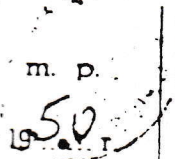


Uprawnia do
przejazdów
kolejami pań-
stwowymi we-
dług ulg tary-
towych dla
funkcjonariu-
szów pań-
stwowych

Karen Strang
Podpis własnoręczny

Ważna na rok wystawienia

Ważność legitymacji przedłuża się na rok



m. p.
19... r.

m. p.
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Izba Skarbowa w Lublinie

pieczęć podłużna wystawcy

Legitymacja Nr 1610

WASH - OVER

nazwisko

IDENTITY

imie (imiona)

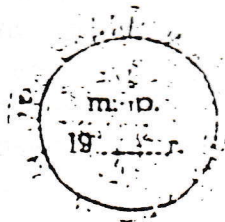
WASH - OVER

stanowisko (tytuł służbowy)

w Urzędzie Skarbowym w Kraśniku

Lublin, dn. 15.07.1987

PODPOIS WŁADY
[signature]
(KRAŚNICKI)



podpis

Scotland 1987©

POLIGRAFIMA-602

STEFAN SZCZELKUN

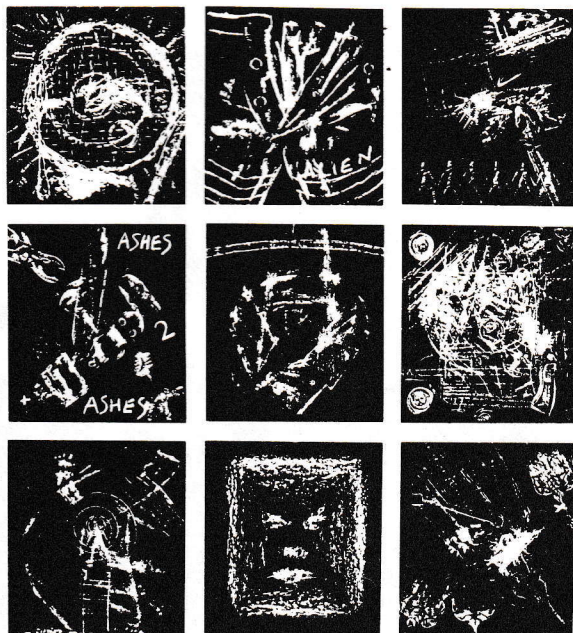
THE NATURE OF OBJECTS

1. Textures recorded from surfaces within my house.
2. The original frottage is copied to accentuate the black/white contrast but dimensional accuracy is retained.
3. An arrangement in 9 sets of 9 acknowledges Hegel's release of Art from the service of knowledge.

4. "When the real world changes into simple images, simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behaviour. The spectacle as a tendency to make one see the world by means of various specialised mediations (it can no longer be grasped directly) naturally finds vision to be the most privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs; the most abstract, the most mystifiable sense corresponds to the generalised abstraction of present-day society. But the spectacle is no longer identifiable with the mere look even combined with hearing. It is that which escapes the activity of men, that which escapes reconsideration and correction by their work. It is the opposite of dialogue. Wherever there is independent representation, the spectacle reconstitutes itself .

"This is the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by intangible as well as tangible things, which reaches its absolute fulfilment in the spectacle, where the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it , and which at the same time are recognised as the tangible *par excellence* ."

Guy Debord: Society of the Spectacle.



5. The page-like size of each drawing suggests that they are leaves from the Black Book of symmetry.

6. As a whole the drawings achieve the most accurate representation of the world. Their perfection is spoilt only by the intrusion of my imagination. Objective in impression but subjective in relation.

7. My whole world of domesticity, technology and objects in all its banality is contained within these 81 pieces of Routine Art.

8 This is bad drawing at its best. Directing or attention to the tactile referent of our retinal daily experience. This is raw data..... you may be an 'artist'.

9. This is not a limited edition. The copies are of greater quality than the original.

Stefan Szczelkun, 1985/6



Pavel Kwasniewski ; performance piece "Soliloquy" - Galeria Dzialan "Gallery of Actions", part of a festival of interventions and time-based work in the Ursynow-Imielin housing estate, Warsaw, 1987.

ARTISTS OF THE
POLISH VISION



CONTEMPORARY POLISH VISUAL ART

does not seem to have a strong identity abroad: perhaps writers, filmmakers and political thinkers address the issues that interest the West in more direct ways; perhaps also the forms that many artists in Poland have turned to as an alternative to state-sponsored mediocrity are equally unacceptable in the mainstream of western culture.

The struggle for freedom of thought and the liberation of human consciousness takes place with equal intensity at every level of every society - artists are not necessarily the vanguardists they would like to think they are but, as artists, the members of BIGOS have tried to play a small part in that struggle.

About 9 months ago some of us in the group sent out a general invitation to contacts in the U.K., Poland and elsewhere to submit material for a magazine which would examine particular aspects of Polish visual art activity in Poland and abroad and among second- and third-generation Poles, and the way these fitted into international developments in the

Arts. This project has yet to be realised - but those of us involved have received a steady stream of words and images too diverse to draw any neat conclusions from or to categorise in ways that would support any particular reading of contemporary Polish culture.

Rather than trying to do this I will let just one of our friends in Poland speak for himself; Piotr Szyhalski is a young printmaker and photographer living in Kalisz, near Poznan. These extracts from a recent letter are less to do with problems specific to Poland but more about those faced by creative artists in any society who try to practice their craft with any degree of integrity.....



"Dear BIGOS,

at the end of our last telephone conversation the question was raised about my attitude to Art, creative activity etc... Well, it is impossible to deal with these matters in a few words.....

A few years ago the problem for "who", "what" and "Why" did not exist for me at all. What a wonderful period that was ! Limited by nothing I could simply paint without caring about anything. Unfortunately that couldn't go on... Idealistic programmes for creating an escape from the mud of everyday vanished when I realised to my surprise that while running away I'm deep in mud different from the other only in colour and smell. While I

attributed the myths about selling art, commercialism and the disappearance of an idealistic attitude to creativity to "the rotten world of imperialism" I discovered that the situation of an artist in our democratic workers' and peasants' state is even worse.

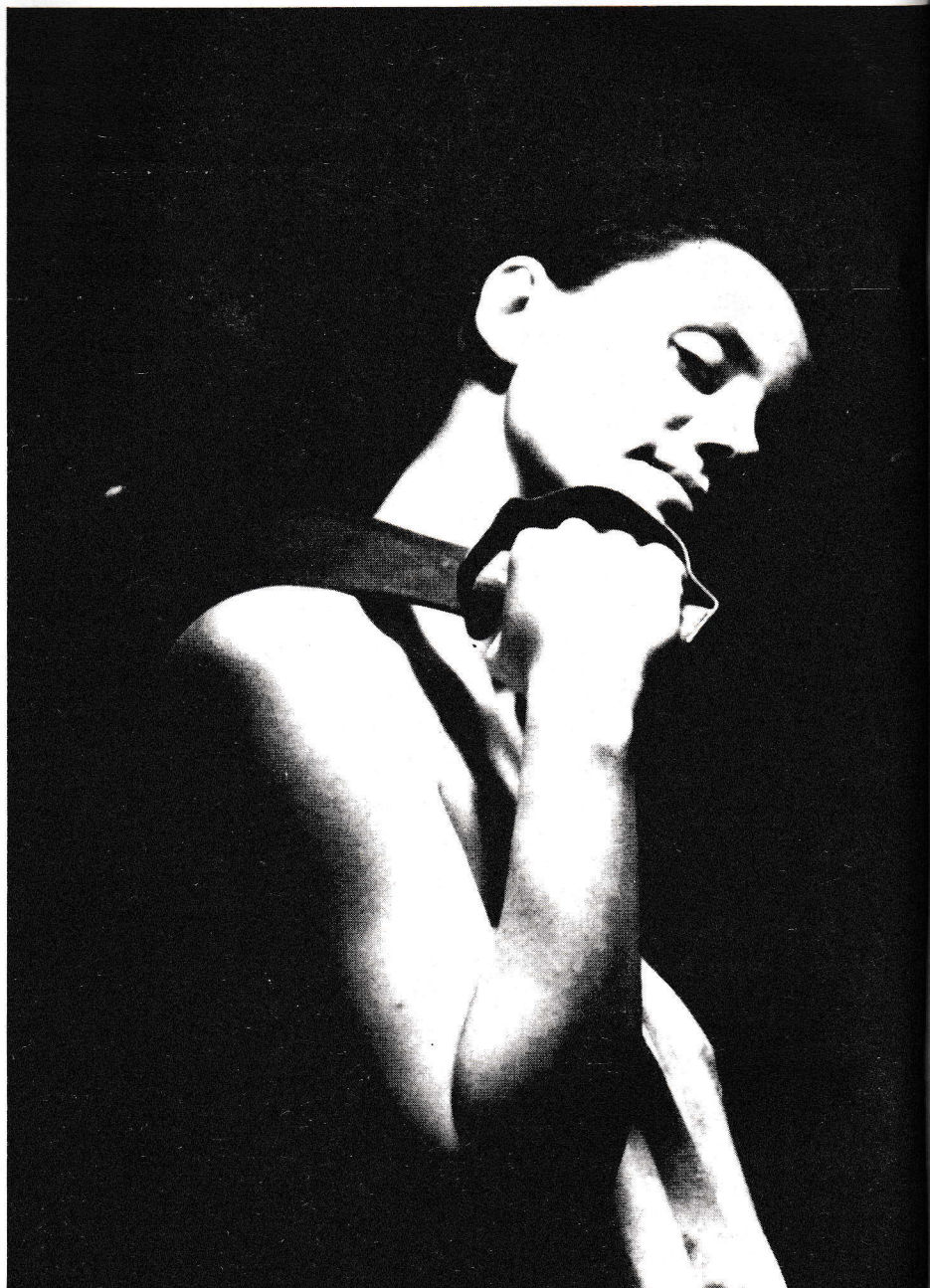
Here we are all running in the big horse race not as professional jockeys doing a routine job for big money but as a bunch of amateurs equipped with the one trump card - unmitigated envy.....

Polish art is condemned to constant thoughtless duplication of western models. When the fashion for Wild Expressionism was stimulated by demand on the western market it flooded the world; in our country the time bomb of wild painting and sculpture exploded some years later. It is, of course, described as "New".

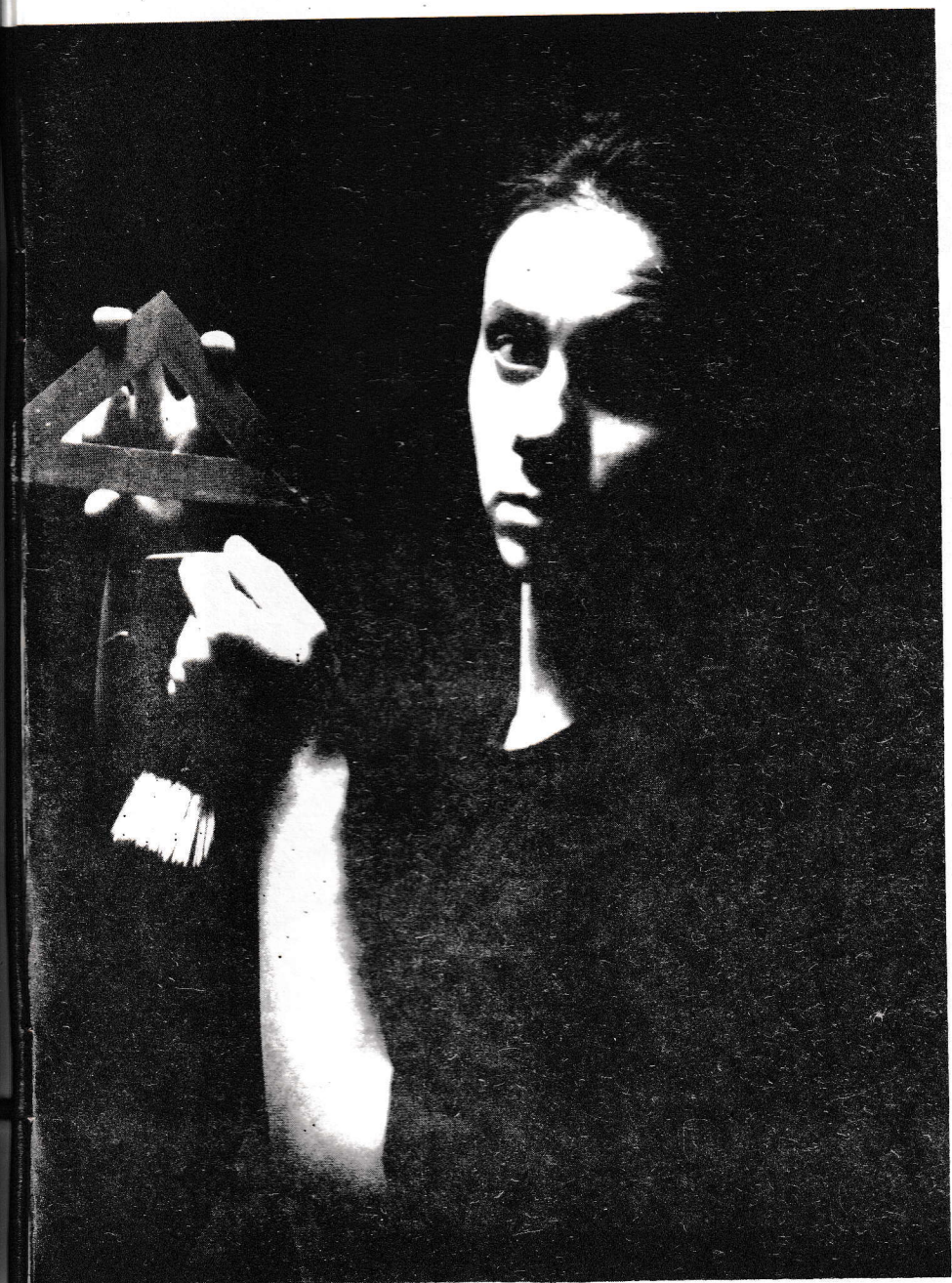
The difference lies in the fact that in the west an "expressionist artist" paints what he will be paid for, while our "New Artists" rehash a hundred times the meals thrown out long ago and nobody has the appetite for them. They do this with the celebration and pride of their consequent and matured artistic attitude. With wild passion they chase the possibility of the next exhibition - not caring where or at what price. Thus the "wild" rebellious artist standing out against the surrounding reality presents his work in galleries run by the socialist youth organisations or the like.....

This was the reason I decided not to exhibit here any more..... but the need to articulate doesn't disappear. I was tormented and tossed between aversion to presumptuous expansion of pseudo-personality and the need to communicate and share with others.

Into this cauldron of thoughts the idea of working in concealment was born. The basic and originally the only function of artistic work I envisaged was healing myself. Since that time, I have devoted myself to my "exercises" with wholehearted enthusiasm, I don't care if my work is treated as backward, marginal, innovatory or revelational. But without doubt I can say that I chose the right way, and slowly but consistently I progress towards peace and humility.....



"Spiritual Exercise", Photograph, Piotr Szynalski, 1988.





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ART GROUP